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# THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER

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# The Practice of Prayer

BY

WILLIAM C. STURGIS, PH.D.

With Preface by the Right Reverend
PHILIP M. RHINELANDER, D.D.
Warden of Washington Cathedral College
of Preachers

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# PREFACE

IN OCTOBER, 1928, Mr. William C. Sturgis, the author of this book, who had been, for some years previously, the Educational Secretary of the Department of Missions of the Episcopal Church, gave a course of informal lectures on Prayer in connection with the meeting of General Convention in Washington. The subject, as presented in these lectures, aroused much interest and led to many requests that the substance of the lectures should be put into some permanent form. This volume is now printed in answer to these requests. It takes its place in "The Washington Cathedral Series," published under the auspices of the College of Preachers, with which the author is now associated as a leader of conferences for laymen.

While Mr. Sturgis would be the first to disclaim any originality in his presentation of this familiar topic, at the same time his

treatment has a very distinct and convincing atmosphere and appeal. The approach is unusual, being that of a layman who has as background a long training in Biology. His scientific study has led him more and more to belief in God, not only as the ultimate reality, but as manifested everywhere and always in His world as law and order. In this book, following the same conviction, the author finds, in this particular source of power or energy known as Prayer, a force which must be, and is, governed and directed by ascertainable laws precisely as are the physical forces in what we call Nature.

In Mr. Sturgis there is that rare and blessed combination of ardent zeal and competent knowledge. Science and Religion for him do not need "reconciliation." He finds in them close allies, each giving to the other illumination and security. His book is a singularly clear illustration of this. As Warden of the College of Preachers, I am most thankful that it should find its place among the first in the series of our publications.

PHILIP M. RHINELANDER.

## CHAPTER I.

TO THE MIND of one who thinks at all of God, two qualities must be apparent—God's omnipotence, and his omnipresence. If these two qualities are thought of together, as they should be, it becomes evident that man is surrounded continually by an incalculable source of energy, manifested sometimes in physical and measurable, sometimes in spiritual and immeasurable, terms; but both, equally, having God as their origin.

To speak of God's power as "omnipotent," however, is not to say that He can do whatever He likes, for He is self-limited by His own nature, from which proceed all law and order. Hence God cannot make a square circle, or stop a falling body in mid air, or coerce man's free will. Nevertheless, the law of His being directs His power and it becomes necessary, therefore, whether in the

physical realm or in the spiritual, to discover the laws which govern power. Professor Drummond's famous and still valuable book, *Natural Law in the Spiritual World,* might quite as well have been entitled *Spiritual Law in the Natural World.* Indeed it is difficult to see how there can be any conflict between Science and Religion since both deal with ordered power, and at the centre of all power is God.

If, then, we desire to utilize power subject to law, it is essential that we first discover the laws governing power. The scientist, within his domain, is constantly engaged in this quest; and it is no less incumbent on the man of religion to do the same within his domain. The scientist seeks the principles upon which the forces of Nature work, in order to utilize those forces; the religious mind dwells upon spiritual forces to discover their principles and application. It is, therefore, not improper to speak of the science of prayer, much as we speak of the science of electricity, etc.; and in both cases, the first step is to try, by experiment, to discover what laws govern

that particular science which we wish to apply.

Let us clarify our minds a little further. I have spoken of Prayer as power or force, giving the impression that Prayer in itself is power; but I have also referred all power back to God as its source. The trouble with many scientists, historians, and the like, is that they investigate those forces which produce natural phenomena and mould the course of human progress, but fail to carry the process of investigation far enough back to discover the ultimate source in the immanent providence of God. The great value of the Hebrew Scriptures is that the writers persistently refer the whole story of creation and the development of mankind to a personal God by whose power and will all things in heaven and earth are guided. And although their application of this idea is often faulty and limited, nevertheless the idea itself is fundamentally sound. The four words with which the Book of Genesis opens —"In the beginning God"—are the most majestic and satisfying expression of primal

fact which the mind of man has ever conceived.

Strictly speaking, Prayer, in itself, is not power. I have in my possession, picked up years ago in India, a small apparatus composed of a cylinder of bone revolving loosely on a handle. A small weight is attached to the cylinder by a string, and on the cylinder are inscribed short prayers. By a circular motion of the wrist, the cylinder is made to revolve on its axle. It is a Thibetan prayer-wheel, and each revolution of the cylinder counts as a repetition of the prayers written on it. I have seen a labor-saving modification of this device, in which the cylinder is geared to a water-wheel; so that as long as the stream runs, the supplicant is sure of having his prayers said, irrespective of any thought or attention on his part. We may smile at the naïveté of these crude minds, but is our own praying always on a much higher plane of understanding with respect to the true principles of prayer?

Or again, we may heat an open pan of water at 212°, and it then gives off a vapour

which we call steam. We think of steam as power, but is it? Only when that vapour is confined and subjected forcibly to the laws of the expansion of gases can it be transformed into power and made useful. Left free from law, it has power only to scald and hurt. Experience tells me that much of our fancied praying may rightly be described as "mere vapourizing," such as is not only of no use but may actually produce injury. It has not been subjected to the laws governing effective Prayer.

So while it may not be correct to speak of Prayer as power, yet the power of God is latent in it, awaiting only our discovery and application of the laws which govern it, to make it available, effective, and wholly beneficent. It is just because God Himself is Law, that His power is directed in accordance with law; and it is because Prayer is governed by law that we can calculate and count on it with confidence.

Under these circumstances, the investigation of the nature of Prayer, its laws and its effects, must appear as a most serious under-

taking; and experiments with this incalculable medium of power, as one of the supreme efforts of the human mind and will. Such experiment is a risky business when we are dealing with any mighty force.

On a certain stormy night in the year 1752, when the heavy clouds hung low, and the thunder roared, and the lightning crackled overhead, Benjamin Franklin sent up his silken kite, and holding the string in his hand waited calmly for no less a portent than contact with that elemental and destructive force above him and its imprisonment in his Leyden jar. He knew little of electricity, but what he did know assured him that if his theories should prove inconsistent with the laws governing the course of electric currents, he might pay for his rashness with his life. It has always seemed to me that among the many scientists who have put everything to the hazard for the ultimate benefit of mankind, few stand higher than Franklin.

The case is similar when we approach the mighty power of God as manifested through

prayer. Should a man attempt to seize upon that power in ignorance or regardless of the laws which govern it, he might be running a momentous risk. St. Paul used the power called prayer constantly and effectively, but he knew its danger. Concerning the highest and most concentrated form, he warned the Corinthian Christians that, as a result of their attempting to use it without due regard to the laws governing it, many of them had become sick and some had even died.[1] The Book of Common Prayer contains a similar warning in the same connection.[2]

Now I can distinctly hear some experienced Christian who has read thus far, exclaiming, "What a dreadful conception of prayer the man has! Does he know nothing of God's love? Has he never experienced that quiet and happy communion with the Father which is the very heart of prayer?" Well, you are quite right. In the full appreciation and realization of God's loving Fatherhood and of our sonship is the possibility

[1] I Cor. 11:28-30.

[2] See the first Exhortation following the Order for the Administration of the Holy Communion, p. 85.

of a constant communion, than which no experience on earth gives such a foretaste of the peace and joy of heaven. But, in the first place, I am not writing for experienced Christians, but for novices and those whose religion is of the usual thoughtless and formal type; and in the second place, the whole record of God's dealing with man indicates that He demands that man approach Him with "reverence and godly fear." We cannot too often remind ourselves that before the awful majesty and purity of God, the very angels of heaven veil their faces. The approach to Him through prayer, and the attempt thus to make use of His power, is a most serious undertaking.

There have been many attempts to define Prayer and to explain its meaning, but I think that the more one knows about it, the less can one express its meaning in words. And this, because it is so varied in its forms and aspects, and so identified with those realities which are spiritual rather than physical.

We can, however, think of Prayer under various categories:

First, though not foremost, is that aspect of prayer which is described as *Petition*. This is as far as most people arrive in their practice of prayer. Its motive is based on some personal need, real or fancied. It is apt to be self-centred, and often leads to a sort of bargaining with God, "If Thou wilt . . . then I will"—a *quid pro quo* attitude of mind which is excusable only because childish. It is the form characteristic of primitive peoples; yet it must constantly be used by Christians of the most saintly spirit.

When petition is used on behalf of others than one's self, it reaches a far higher plane, and becomes *Intercession*. Our Lord constantly commends its use, especially where two or more of His followers are able to agree together on some particular subject of intercession.[3]

But though thus commended, and though great assurance of success attends their use, the petitionary forms of prayer are less than the highest. These, in their perfect expression, are reserved for heaven itself; though

[3] St. Matt. 18:19.

even here on earth we Christians can realize the communion of saints—the oneness of the whole Church—when we join, however imperfectly, with all the hosts of heaven in *Praise, Thanksgiving,* and *Worship,* with God alone before our minds. These are the mountaintops of prayer, and if any of us has been in the habit of thinking of prayer merely as the act of asking God for something in words, a little careful thinking on the nature and object of worship might lead him to revise his conception of prayer as a whole and, possibly, to try his hand at a definition of it even though many have made the same attempt before. To puzzle these matters out for oneself is an invaluable spiritual and mental exercise.

There remains still one form of prayer which, since it embraces all the others, may well be regarded as their sum and completion. It is that quiet communion between God and the individual soul, which might be called conversing with God (though no words are required), or thinking about God in contemplation, or, in a familiar phrase, practis-

ing the presence of God. Of such quiet times alone with God there is urgent need in these days of turmoil and speed. We are always so terribly busy in expressing ourselves in words and acts that it would do us an immense amount of good if, for a few moments each day, we would make ourselves passive and wordless in the realized presence of God. Then the spirit of worship and praise would hold us, needs unexpressed would well up in our souls, and we would hear the voice of the Lord God. The great trouble with our times of private prayer, and still more with our forms of public worship, is that so little opportunity is given for silence. We must be constantly doing something or saying something. The Society of Friends has learned better. It was Cardinal Mercier who used to remind his people that what the boy Samuel said was, "Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth"; not, "Hear, Lord, for Thy servant speaketh."

Well, so much for the various forms of Prayer. They are all subject to ascertainable laws apart from which their efficacy is les-

sened if not completely lost. But before passing to a consideration of those laws, it would be well to ask ourselves which of our faculties—mind, emotion, will—is chiefly drawn upon in Prayer. Is praying an intellectual process only, or is it a matter wholly of the emotions? What, if anything, has the will—the sense of duty, to do with the practice of prayer? Or is it not one faculty only that is to be exercised, but all three in harmony? I think that this latter will prove to be the case.

Take the mind, for example. Can Prayer be other than a mental process, and a very exigent one? Must not some need be at the root of my prayer, and does not that need require thought for its expression? We are told that God requires us to serve Him with "all our *mind*." How then can we serve Him aright in thoughtless praying? The very forms in which the saints of God, throughout the ages, have expressed themselves in prayer have the simplicity characteristic of man's mind at its best. Try, yourself, to write out a prayer expressive of a personal need, or of

thanksgiving, or of worship, and you will find how necessary is an intellectual grasp of the subject. You have to think. Yes, unless my *mind* is deeply engaged when I am praying, something is lacking.

But just here someone asks, how about prayers in an unknown language—the Roman Mass in Latin, for example, joined in by an ignorant French peasant! This is a case which tempts many good Protestants to scorn. To them the whole thing is unreal—mere formalism and superstition, they call it—no true prayer whatever. Yet, one who has watched that French peasant at Mass has seen the very spirit of rapt devotion. He is giving and receiving something very real. He is assisting at a great drama, every step of which he knows. I cannot but think that his soul is receiving, partly through his emotions, but partly through his dull mind as well.

Let me give an illustration. I am no musician, but I cannot express what Brahm's *First Symphony* means to me. I don't understand the language; I have no idea what the

composer is saying in his music; I can't analyze his themes or interpret his thought. But everything pure and noble in me responds to the music. No doubt the response is largely emotional; but to say that my mind is not a medium of the response as well seems to me sheer nonsense. I may grant that the peasant would be more truly praying if the language of the Mass were understood by him, just as I grant that if only I understood music, the symphony would mean still more to me; but I cannot believe that either the peasant or I have experienced a wholly non-intellectual benefit. Moreover, in both cases, there is abundant evidence that our minds have been exercised and concentrated to the greater or less exclusion of everything else. We can hardly escape the conclusion, therefore, that while Prayer demands a definite mental effort where such effort is possible, the effect of Prayer may nevertheless be visible as passed on to the soul through the mind, without a conscious intellectual effort.

As to the share of the emotions in the act

of prayer, it is a large and important one. But one must discriminate. Such emotions as hate, anger, malice, self-love, or the like are absolutely inconsistent with every principle of true prayer; and, if allowed to influence our praying, may have results which are not only of negative value but positively harmful.

We must distinguish, too, between the proper exercise of the purer emotions on the one hand, and emotionalism on the other. Prayer is not a mere outlet for the emotions; and even though we may be moved to tears by beautiful phrases, or experience a momentary sense of remorse when our sinfulness is brought home to us, or feel a sudden exaltation in an act of praise, these give no proof that our emotions have been legitimately used. It is the permanent effect which counts—an increasing sense of the beauty of holiness, a real amendment of life, a constant spirit of praise and thanksgiving. The true test of the emotions aroused on Sunday is our behaviour on Monday. It is not difficult to be touched to the heart by a moving performance of a play depicting the victim of

some social wrong; but unless we are stirred to attempt to right the wrong in actual life, we are in no better case than the ancient Greeks who wept profusely at the domestic tragedies portrayed by Euripides, while countenancing social depravity even among their gods. The excess of empty emotionalism such as may be observed in a negro camp-meeting, or is associated with some types of revivalism, or forms the basis of certain eccentric cults—this is a prostitution of emotion in relation to Prayer.

On the other hand, all of us have read of those floods of emotional feeling and expression which have at times swept over the souls of saints and ascetics when engaged in prayer and contemplation, and have helped to produce characters of the utmost holiness. Such an experience may not be for us, but we can all appreciate the statement of a friend of mine who tells me that a true ecstasy comes to him when, after the solemn confession in the Eucharistic Office, he hears the authoritative declaration of his personal absolution. We cannot deny to emotion its necessary

relation to Prayer; only, we must guard ourselves against the temptation to let our emotions run away with us and deceive us. They must be disciplined by intelligence.

The share of the *will* in the practice of prayer is more difficult to determine clearly. It goes without saying that Prayer must never, under any circumstances, be regarded as an attempt to change God's will, but rather as a constant effort to discover His will, and to bring ours into conformity with it. Being what He is, and His relation toward us also being what it is, it would be most unfortunate if our prayers could in any manner or degree interfere with or obstruct His will for us. It cannot be too strongly urged that our Lord's words, "Thy will be done," are never to be used, as they so often are by us, as an expression of helpless and pious resignation. For the Father's will toward every one of His children cannot but be the ultimate good, since it is directed by infinite Power, infinite Love, and infinite Wisdom. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him."

But there is another sense in which the will enters into the practice of Prayer; that is, in the sense of *duty*.

It is hardly necessary to point out that there is something obligatory about prayer. The principles laid down for the guidance of the early Christians assume that, of course, each one shall have his regular times for private prayer—morning, noon, and night at least. It was also the custom in the early Church for all of its members to meet together every Sunday morning for corporate worship, and a New Testament writer speaks of this as an *obligation* resting upon all Christians.[4] It is only by repeated acts of prayer at specific and regular times that prayer can become a habit. It is in the formation of this habit that our children, after they are turned loose, would possess a safeguard which they usually lack.

A boy going to college with an ingrained habit of prayer and church-going, will generally find the habit more easy to keep than to break. It is all nonsense for a grown man

[4] Heb. 10:25.

to say, as he often does, that he was made to go to church so much as a boy that he has never gone since. The same argument could be brought against anything of value which his parents had obliged him to do. It would be quite as sensible for him to say that because arithmetic was hammered into his head at school, he never kept any accounts now. No! The Church, as the visible body on earth of Him who claimed all authority, has the right to command her children, and when she tells us to "pray without ceasing" and not to neglect "the assembling of ourselves together" for worship, she intends that each one of us is to accept the self-imposed obligation of habitual prayer, both in public and private—a habit which has its stated times, and with which nothing is allowed to interfere. It is one of the *imperatives* of Christianity.

To the expert Christian, such times are the most joyous and satisfying of his whole day or week. With eager anticipation he looks forward, in the midst of the rush and turmoil of his life, to those calm intervals

of power and peace. But for the beginner, to whom prayer may be entirely a matter of emotion to be practised only when "he feels like it," a very definite and determined exercise of the will is required before the habit becomes the joyous resting of the spirit in the presence of God. Indeed Prayer is very much of an art.

I recall once speaking with a boy who was studying the violin.

"How much do you practise?" I asked him.

"It varies," he replied. "Some days, two or three hours; other days, when I don't feel like it, I just pick it up for a few minutes." "But," I said, "you'll never become an expert that way." His response was suggestive: "Oh, I never expect to become an expert. I only want to be able to play for my own pleasure."

I wondered at the time if the musician who labored with the youngster, or his parents who paid for the lessons, knew of his painfully limited ambition—to use a noble instrument, the music of which might sway

the spirits of thousands, merely for his own selfish pleasure. And this, because he lacked the will-power to force himself to practise, even though, at times, it might be actual drudgery.

So it is with the art called Prayer. We pray and worship only when we feel like it; we are undisciplined, badly brought up, allowed to think that the commands of the Church have no authority; and so decline to utilize a single means of grace by force of habit. No wonder that there are so few Christians who are in the way of becoming experts in Prayer along the path of determined will and set habit! We surely need the Collect, "that our hearts may be *set* to obey thy commandments"—*set,* like a compass needle toward the pole; not shifting, like a weather-vane, with every slant of feeling.

So Prayer demands the exercise of every faculty. It is an intellectual process, since we are to serve God with all our mind. It is a matter of the heart, and every lofty emotion has its just part in it. It recognizes

the supremacy of God's will, and demands the exercise of man's will in obedience. It would be well often to examine our manner of praying lest it be vitiated by an unintelligent mind, uncurbed emotions, or a divided will.

## CHAPTER II.

THUS far we have been thinking of Prayer as a means whereby we can come in touch with God and thus make use of His immeasurable power to attain definite spiritual results. We have seen that Prayer resembles a science in that its action is governed by laws which it is necessary to discover and apply if the power is to be thoroughly effective.

In the preceding chapter, it was suggested that Prayer is also analogous to Art, since its practice draws upon man's spiritual capacities at their highest. It is interesting to consider further in this connection another similarity.

Just as the arts of music or painting or architecture require expression, so does prayer. It is true that formal expression is not essential to artistic conception. A Beethoven hears within him the music of his sym-

phony before a note of the score is written; Raphael had the inner vision of the Sistine Madonna before his brush touched the chapel wall. But in neither case could there have been complete satisfaction until the harmonies were scored for the orchestra, and the colours and forms glowed on the plaster. Doubtless, the artist often spends hours in quiet meditation on the nature and the subjects of his art; scores of visions must pass through his mind for every one which finds expression; nevertheless, unless that one ultimately springs to life in form, the artist remains a mere dreamer.

So it is with the Art of Prayer. The Christian may spend hours in meditation—in silent communion with God—but his meditation lacks fixity of purpose and definiteness of aim unless it frequently finds expression in words. It is true that mere desire is, in a sense, prayer; but it should be noted that our Lord bids us put our desires into words. He says not when ye desire, but *when ye pray, say.*

Moreover, just as the artist must learn to

express himself in terms not only suited to his special art but also in keeping with the best canons of that art, so it is with Prayer. I may be old-fashioned, but I am free to confess that much of the present "jazz" music, cubist painting, etc., seems to me quite unworthy to be called art in any true sense of the word. Similarly, I have heard much praying which seemed to be decidedly "jazzy"—formless, unrhythmical, expressive and inducive of ideas incongruous with the spirit of prayer, obviously not the result of true communion with a God of wisdom and beauty and order.

Years ago, I frequently went to hear one of the most eminent Congregational ministers of New England. His sermons were admirable—carefully thought out, beautifully expressed; but when he came to the "long prayer," it was only too painfully evident not only that the spirit of worship was absent, but that not the slightest provision or pains had been taken to express the thought in any beauty of form whatever. Every power of his mind had been concentrated on his

sermon; the form of his praying mattered nothing.

It is idle to say that God regards the spirit rather than the form; or, as some do, that He is impatient of all form. This is to confuse *form* and *formalism;* and it is to be noted that our Lord gave to His disciples a set form of prayer. Also it is inconceivable that God willingly accepts less than the best we have to offer, whether it be a matter of the mind or of the heart or of the will.

Hence they are to be congratulated who have become imbued with the spirit of prayer as expressed in the Collects of the Book of Common Prayer. It should be noted that these Collects are not intended primarily for personal use.

A young girl, unaccustomed to the Church service, came to me one Sunday and, after expressing her appreciation of the beauty of the service, said that she missed the personal note in the prayers—the expression of her own individual needs. Of course the only reply was that what she found lacking was what was never intended to be there.

The very title of the Prayer Book shows that its contents are intended for *common* use at times when the whole Church worships as a corporate body, and when the needs and aspirations of the individual are completely merged in the needs of the whole. The absence of the personal note is for the definite purpose of fixing the minds of all worshippers on the solidarity of the Church in the communion of saints.

The content of any Collect can, of course, be given a personal application, and many of them are invaluable helps to meditation and private prayer; but anyone who in church thus diverts these prayers from their proper intention misses the whole point of public worship.

In substance and form, the Collects are well-nigh perfect expressions of the art of prayer, because they are forms in which great experts have expressed their common needs. Doubtless thousands of prayers of saints have been written down by them or their followers; collections of such prayers, both ancient and modern, exist today; most

of them, however, have disappeared. But those in the Prayer Book have survived; they have stood the test of time and experience; they represent the survival of the fittest. That is one reason why revision of the Book of Common Prayer is so difficult a task, especially in the matter of inserting new prayers which shall be in any degree worthy of their ancient setting.

Again, the Collects are reverent and restrained in tone; they voice the spirit of worship. They begin normally with a brief ascription, recalling to the mind some aspect or quality of God either in Himself or in His relationship to us, and thus they afford excellent themes for meditation either before going to church or in the quiet interval before the service begins.

Note, too, the simplicity of the Collects, especially those for the Christian Year. Each contains but a single thought or petition, simply and distinctly expressed; so that they offer the means of practising that concentration of mind which, as we shall see later, is so essential in praying. The mind which can-

not focus all its attention on the substance of a Collect must be a loose and wandering one indeed. A normal mind should find no difficulty or strain in view of the brevity and conciseness of these prayers.

Nor should we fail to note the character of the pronouns; unlike most of our hymns, the first person singular never occurs.

Finally, the Collects are in the highest degree effective because the petitions which they express are always for such things as God is most desirous of giving us. When we come to consider the conditions which render Prayer effective, we shall see that it is of primary importance that the object of effective petition must always be something which is in accord with God's will. Such objects, the Collects of the Church Year invariably set before us.

I have dwelt at such length on the Collects because they are illustrations of so many of the laws of prayer. It is of these laws that we must now think, if we are to begin to appreciate the nature of prayer and to use it as a source of spiritual power.

Most of us are willing enough—even eager—to live as God would have us. But mere willingness is not sufficient; what we want is power.

Some years ago, I was present at a tennis match of experts. Watching the game most intently was a former tennis star. He followed every move and stroke with eager excitement; it was evident that he would have given anything he possessed to be in the game. But he was watching from a wheel chair; a late attack of infantile paralysis had left him powerless. The will to play was there, pathetically strong, but the power was lacking. And this is precisely where many a man stands regarding the full activity of the Christian life. He desires it, but he seems to have no power to fulfil his desire. What he needs is to realize the God-given power which comes through Prayer properly understood and applied. In the next chapter we will try to discover some of the laws which govern Prayer and which, in their application, bring us within reach of the effective power of God.

## CHAPTER III.

IF we were to read the books of the Old Testament consecutively with the view of learning how, from very early times, devout searchers after God learned to approach Him, it would not be difficult to trace the development of prayer in practice and to discover the principles upon which it is based. But one would quickly realize that in those ancient times the right practice of prayer, though steadily developing, had not yet reached its acme—that even at its best it still came short of expressing any satisfying apprehension of the character of God.[1] The songs of Miriam and Deborah and the prophecies of Balak are great paeans of praise and thanksgiving to the God who favoured Israel; the prayer of Samuel's mother

[1] For the following instances, see Ex. 15; Judg. 5; Num. 23 and 24; II Sam. 22; I Sam. 2; I Chron. 16 and II Chron. 6; Dan. 9.

suggests that of the Blessed Virgin without the latter's spirit of humility and depth of meaning; David's thanksgiving for delivery is, like so many of the Psalms, a fine recognition of the majesty and power of God as shown toward him personally; the dedicatory prayers of David and Solomon, beautiful though they are, centre in the thought of a tribal and localized deity; Daniel's confession has no thought but that of "the great and dreadful God"; even the tenderest of the Psalms are poetic expressions of a longing after God rather than of a conviction that God is at length found.

Not so when we come to the New Testament. Here, in the Lord's Prayer, is the final apprehension of God in his attributes of infinite power, love, and wisdom, made available to every child of His in every need and in all circumstances and relationships everywhere. A careful study of that great model of perfect prayer would convince us that it is the basis of all the subsequent apostolic teaching regarding the nature of God and man's approach to Him in prayer.

To the New Testament, then, we turn to discover the true nature of God, the attitude of mind in which we must approach Him, and those laws through the observance of which we can make our praying acceptable and efficacious.

The Epistle to the Hebrews, by whomever written, is a notable one in that it applies the Hebrew cast of mind to the interpretation of the Christian Faith. It is a sort of connecting link, spiritually, between the Old Testament and the New; and we would, therefore, naturally expect to find in it some very definite and fundamental teaching regarding Prayer, carried over and developed from Jewish thought. And since the Hebrew searchers after God had been rewarded by an ever increasing conviction of the being and reality of God, so that this fact had passed far beyond the region of mere speculative reasoning and had become the very root of their every thought and act, so we would look to this Epistle for our starting point in the desired access to power through

prayer, and we would expect to find that starting point in a firm conviction of the existence of a God who is in personal touch with man. This conviction, being the result of faith, would naturally appear in the great chapter on faith; and it is there that we find the primary statement, admitting of no argument:[2] *"He that cometh (draws near) to God must believe that He is (exists), and that he is (proves himself) a rewarder of (does reward) them that [diligently] seek Him."* This we may take as the first law of the Science of Prayer. Let us consider what is involved.

We note, first, that we must start with a conviction—the conviction of God as a Being and Presence; and secondly, that it must be an *effective* conviction—that is, a conviction, whether provable or not, on which we are willing to act experimentally.

Moreover, it must be something more than a merely formal assent to the dogma of the existence of God, and certainly more

[2] Heb. 11:6. The quotation as given includes modern variants from the King James version—Revised, Weymouth, and Moffatt.

than the barren repetition once a week of the opening sentence of the Creed—a parrot could be taught to do that. No, the very foundation of effective praying is the vivid consciousness of a personal Presence who is interested in us to an infinite degree, who longs for our love, who is eager to speak to us, and to hear our words of petition or praise. And the way to that consciousness of God is what has been called "the practice of the presence of God."

Kneel in the quiet of your room; think of yourself as surrounded by a spiritual atmosphere—that the quietness is the effect of God's presence—that the sound of the breeze outside is a symbol of the Spirit of God; open the windows of your mind and soul, that God may enter.

Then, before attempting any words of prayer, try to realize the infinite majesty and holiness of the Person beside you, call to your mind His power and wisdom and love. It may be that because we have known, and can know, these abstract qualities only as we have seen them concretely

in the character of some friend, this brief meditation on such attributes of God may help you to realize Him as a Person. Or it may be that you will be helped by fixing your attention on some mental or visible representation of God—a painting which you once saw, or a picture, or a crucifix. But in whatever way you attain the end, the main thing is to become conscious of God's presence with you at that moment. Then you may find words to say to Him, or you may have grace to listen to what He has to say to you.

Now all this is difficult because there is nothing visible and tangible to catch hold of. It requires the exercise of the imagination. But so does all advance in the pursuit of Religion, or of Science, or of Art. The astronomer notes a certain deflection in the orbit of an almost infinitely distant planet. His imagination is stirred; and knowing the laws which govern the motions of planets, he infers the presence of an attracting body and so reports. He acts on the assumption of an unseen presence; and, in time, a more pierc-

ing lens shows him the object which his imagination pictured.

The physicist, knowing the laws of force and matter, draws on his scientific imagination to forecast the unknown from the known; the result is the radio apparatus or what not, seen by the mind of the inventor long before it is known as a reality.

Similarly, to every form of art, a constructive exercise of imagination is essential.

So is the practice of the presence of God. We start, on good authority, with assuming His existence; we think on those qualities which He must have if He is at all; and at last there comes, in the very depth of our being, a consciousness of Him as the ultimate Reality—a Person more real than any human friend we have.

This consciousness of God must begin, I think, in definite moments set apart for meditation and prayer; but the time will come when, at any moment and whatever our immediate occupation, we will be able to switch our minds off and realize the presence and nearness of God. As we learn this method—

definite periods, daily, of practice of the presence of God, and frequent momentary dissociation of the mind from our ordinary affairs to think of Him—so will He become very real to us, and all life will become simplified through His companionship. A notable example of this is to be found in the "conversations" of Brother Lawrence, a simple and unlearned monk of the seventeenth century. His work as cook in the monastery was not only distasteful to him, but also proved very distracting to the one who desired above all things to keep his mind fixed upon God. Yet he says:

"The time of business does not differ with me from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament." [3]

*"He is a rewarder of them that seek Him."*

The ceaseless consciousness of God's real-

[3] Quoted from *The Practice of the Presence of God the Best Rule of a Holy Life.* Brother Lawrence. Published frequently in many editions.

ity and presence is, in itself, a sufficient reward; but the association of this passage with our Lord's promises regarding prayer indicates that the writer of the Epistle has in mind the seeking of God in prayer.[4]

Parenthetically, I might point out that a search for anything, no matter what, implies that we really miss and want the thing we are looking for; that it is highly desirable to find it; and that, of all places where it *might* be, we will start our search in a place where it is *most likely* to be found. This is true of any search, whether the objective be a lost coin or God.

In the King James version, the word "diligently" is inserted—"them that *diligently* seek Him." It makes little difference, since a search which is not diligent seldom results in finding; but let us consider what is implied by *diligence* in prayer.

First, I should say, diligent means *habitual.* Prayer is a great strengthener of the soul, and just as we need material food for the body's sake, so do our souls need spiritual

[4] See St. Mark 7:7-11.

food. In either case, the food must be of a wholesome kind, properly prepared, and *regularly taken,* if the best results are to be obtained. Every parent knows the value of regularity in eating, in the case of a growing child; few parents seem to realize that the same principle applies to their children's spiritual growth. I am quite sure that the deplorable loss of her young people, from which the Church now suffers, would be decidedly lessened if children were brought up to regard daily and definite times of prayer and a regular weekly Communion as obligations no less insistent than their meals.

What applies in this case, applies equally to "children of a larger growth." No one, not even our Lord Himself, ever approached the fulness of spiritual health without definite times for prayer, set apart by rule, and observed habitually.[5]

The normal person needs at least two meals a day—probably three. He gets the habit of regular eating at specific hours; and

[5] Commenting on I Thess. 5:17, St. Augustine writes: "He prays without ceasing who prays at definite intervals of time."

if he misses a meal he is uncomfortable. Yet there are many of us Christian people who seem to see no special obligation in the matter of the regular strengthening of our souls by communion with God. We are, perhaps, more or less accustomed to "say our prayers" in the morning if there is time before breakfast; in the evening if we are not too tired or sleepy—but this is very different from the famishing thirst for God of which the Psalmist speaks,[6] or the hunger and thirst after righteousness to which our Lord promises full satisfaction.[7] Our praying should be dictated by the greatness and the imminency of our wants, whereas the truth is that our souls are not often hungry, that they have little appetite for food; we are spiritually anaemic, and what we ought to do is to consult a skilled practitioner or find some good tonic. The best tonic that I know of in such a case is some really taxing piece of Church work which is beyond our own strength and ability, and thus obliges us to turn to God for help.

While this need of habit and regularity

[6] Psalm 42: 1-2; 63: 1. [7] St. Matt. 5: 6.

applies in general to all the means of spiritual health and growth—meditation, prayer, public worship, Bible study, careful reading, and so on—it has a very special and extraordinary significance in relation to the supreme food of the soul—the Holy Communion. Even if, at first, and especially in the case of the newly confirmed, the receiving of the Sacrament once a week be regarded from the lower plane of obligation, it is certain that presently the habit of getting up early on the Lord's own day, when the body is refreshed and clean and the brain is clear, in order to obey the Lord's own command, "This do," and to be reunited to Him in the communion of saints, will become the one great event of the week and redound "to our great and endless comfort."

If duty and effort be, as they certainly are, requisites in keeping our bodies in good condition, why should one presume that the growth of the spirit is less demanding? We are told to "work out our own salvation" —our soul's health. This is not a matter of mere feeling, but of obligation.

All this about the value of habit and rule in the matter of the soul's nourishment does not, of course, preclude the practice of continually turning our thoughts Godward whenever the need is felt. The point is that the Christian attitude of mind should be such that at any moment of need or desire a man may turn to his Father, knowing that the supply is always ready and available for his soul's hunger, even though its regular sustenance comes at stated times. Such, then, is the first factor in *diligent* prayer—that it be, in the main, regular and habitual.

Secondly, diligence in prayer implies great *concentration of mind.* I cannot think that God can pay much attention to prayers proceeding from a careless and wandering mind. So far as forms of prayer other than petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and the like, are concerned, it is hardly necessary to emphasize the need of concentration; for anyone who is really desirous of worshipping or of quiet communion with God will naturally do so with fixed attention. Nevertheless, all

forms of public worship include these, and it is well to remind ourselves that every part of the service, whether it be petition or intercession, or worship, or praise and thanksgiving, equally requires close attention on the part of each of us if it is to be truly acceptable to God and effective for the whole body of the Church. When one comes to think of it, the Canticles, the Psalms, the Creed, may all be regarded as forms of prayer, and are therefore not to be joined in absent-mindedly or in a formal and careless fashion.

Especially is this true of the actual prayers in the service; and here the necessity of a determined and persistent effort of the will to secure concentration of mind is most apparent. It is also exceedingly difficult. When we are alone, it is comparatively easy to fix our attention on what we are saying and on the One who is listening. This is partly due to the fact that, there, we are really alone in the silence with God; partly because we are then, in large measure, engaged with our own personal needs.

But in church the case is quite different;

it is almost impossible then to be conscious of the congregation, only as it is a worshipping body of which you are one member. You tend to be conscious of individuals or groups; you think of the choir as singing well or badly; of the way the prayers are said or the Lessons read; of how the children in the next pew are behaving; of the new hat So-and-so is wearing; of what you plan for tomorrow—of anything and everything except the matter immediately in hand.

For this difficulty, the form and manner of our usual Church services are partly to blame. The Book of Common Prayer is, doubtless, the best form of public worship yet compiled; but, at best, the separate Offices are too long in themselves and too frequently combined to permit of continuous concentration of mind. Much advantage would, I am sure, be gained if the various Offices were used quite separately and at different times. The permission to shorten them might also be more generally exercised. But, above all, there ought to be more opportunities for silence on the part of

both priest and people, in order that all who are there gathered might fix their minds upon God in the congenial atmosphere of His house of Prayer.

Of course, people differ in their powers of concentration. Nevertheless, if our attention be called to it, there is not one of us who cannot overcome his restlessness of mind in church, and, notwithstanding the many difficulties at present in the way, attain to a certain degree that fixed attention which is essential to diligent prayer.

For myself, who have little power of mental concentration, I have long been in the habit of practising the little I have, in the hope of increasing it.

I find that the attitude of my body helps. I always kneel on both knees and upright, in so far as our wretched pews allow; that attitude seems to me best to express my conception of God's majesty and, at the same time, my dignity as a man remade in the image of God. It is taken for granted, of course, that where the Prayer Book tells us to kneel, as in the General Con-

fession, we are to kneel on both knees, not sit or crouch even though the floor be a bit dusty, or our trousers be nicely creased; and that when we are bidden to stand, as in the Creed or the *Gloria in Excelsis,* we are to stand upright and at attention. It is not without reason that the Church so enjoins. Attitude induces attention.

I shall never forget the impression made on me when present, as a stranger, some years ago at the opening services of a large Church School in Massachusetts. When called upon to repeat the Creed, the children all arose and stood at attention for a moment, chests out, chins up, backs straight, arms stiff at their sides. Then came a great volume of sound, as those children asserted their belief. They said the Creed just as if they had been told that if they dared to do so they would be shot down at the final *Amen.* It was like the *sacramentum* of the Roman legions before going into battle.

As for the words of the prayers, I found that if I followed them in the Prayer Book

with my eyes open, I was liable to distraction through my eyes; so I learned the prayers by heart in order to be able to close my eyes and yet repeat each prayer mentally with the priest, applying it sentence by sentence. This may be a merely personal idiosyncrasy. I know many great experts in Prayer who can concentrate their minds most effectively by following the prayers with book and eyes open. It is a personal matter, subject to no general rule, custom, or law. The main point is how best one can fix the mind on God and the subject of the prayer without a single wandering thought of any description or on any outside matter. Personally, I have at times found it a help in making common prayer real and definite to pick out some one person near me in the congregation and to associate him with myself in the "we's" and "our's" of the prayers. This helps concentration of mind; but it is better to have the whole congregation in one's thoughts if possible.

As a matter of practice, I have for many years tried myself to see how far I could get

in the Collects, say, of Morning Prayer, with my mind exclusively and determinedly fixed on the presence of God beside me and the words I am saying to Him. I confess quite frankly that, with all my efforts, I have never yet succeeded farther than the third Collect. But I have improved with years. The best thing to do under these circumstances is, I find, to let the mind wander momentarily and within proper bounds, but then to force it back again to the course of the Collects. A prayer which is most useful in this connection is the splendidly inclusive *Prayer for the whole state of Christ's Church.* If you can make that entire prayer with your mind wholly attentive to each consecutive petition, you are well on the road to fulfilling *diligent* prayer.

But, after all, the Sunday Collects of the Church Year are the most perfect forms of prayer, except, of course, the Lord's Prayer, with which to practise concentration in seeking God. How little they serve that purpose may be made quite evident to each of us. The special Collect for each Sunday is ordered

for use, not only on that day, but on every day of that week. It embodies the thought or the petition which the Church intends to make dominant in the mind and in the eager desire of each one of her children throughout the week. The thought embodied is direct, simple, and easily borne in mind. Yet how many of us can repeat, at this moment, the Collect for last Sunday, or even say what it was about?

Suppose one of your children had come to you a few days ago, most eagerly asking you to give him a jack-knife or some such thing as children think they can't possibly do without. You told him that you would think it over. Today you call him and ask him what it was he had begged of you, and you find that other matters have crowded in and he can't remember just what it was. Does he get from you what he had asked? Not if you are wise. Yet is not this precisely what we are doing—even in the case of these simple, brief, and direct petitions contained in the Collects? We say them on Sundays, perhaps quite earnestly at the

moment; but by Wednesday we have completely forgotten what it was we asked for. There is no mark of diligence in such asking or seeking or knocking at the gates of our Father's house of Prayer.

In our times of private prayer, concentration of mind is certainly easier; but, even here, the will must be summoned to reënforce the mind and body. Hence it is well to prepare ourselves for actual prayer by a few moments of practising the presence of God and meditating on Him, of course guarding ourselves against mistaking mere empty-mindedness or drowsiness for meditation. It is helpful at such times to have in mind some brief sentence expressing an attribute of God or of His relationship to us—"Blessed be the Lord my Strength", "God is Love", "Like as a father pitieth", "Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth", "God is in heaven and thou upon earth;" many such suggestive phrases will come to mind as a preparation for prayer and as a means of fixing the attention.

As to the subject of private prayer, that

is a purely personal matter; but the normal order of our petitions should be that of the Lord's Prayer—first, for the fulfilment of God's will and rule on earth; then for the temporal needs of ourselves and our fellow-Christians; then for repentance, forgiveness, and deliverance; and finally, praise and thanksgiving.

To learn to use one's own words in private prayer is, I think, most valuable; not only because one thus expresses his real desires and needs, but because the act of expression gives definiteness and reality. Especially is this true in the matter of confession of sins. I have found that to recall, in my evening prayers, the actual sins committed by me that day, and to acknowledge and confess them aloud, gives a most embarrassing reality to my offences.

A third factor in diligent prayer is that it be definite in aim and persistent in character. When we come to God, it should be with very clear-cut needs in mind, whether they be our own, or those of others, or of the whole

Church. Vague prayers, without any particular aim, induce vagueness in our consciousness of God. This is a marked characteristic of even the most beautiful prayers associated with all non-Christian forms of religion; one misses in them the personal relation of a man toward his God, and the feeling of definite need as prompting the prayer.

It is for this reason, again, that the Collects of the Book of Common Prayer have commended themselves to such countless numbers of Christian people, and are constantly finding a wider use among those to whom they are unfamiliar.

A few years ago, crossing the Atlantic, I fell in with a charming old Methodist minister; and one evening our conversation chanced to turn on the truly American habit of mind—worry. I quoted as the cure for worry the Collect for the Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity. To my amazement, the old man rose from his seat and for some moments gazed out on the stars; then, turning to me, he said: "Where did you find that prayer? I have never heard

its equal. It condenses in definite and simple terms my greatest need, *'a quiet mind.'* " It seemed to me incredible that he, a Methodist, whose heritage, alike with Anglicans, is the Prayer Book, should discover the Collects for the first time in a long life of ministry. The incident goes to show how valuable is the Prayer Book in teaching us the need of definiteness in our praying.

If this be true in the matter of common prayer, it is equally so of our private prayers. Children naturally pray with very definite intention; and, if left to themselves to pray in their own words and not *taught* prayers too much, they will often surprise us by their evident sense of the reality and nearness of God. They know what they want, and are sure that their Father is able to give it to them. There are many of St. Paul's "childish things" which we older people put away all too readily.

To a definite objective, we are to add a certain persistency if our praying is to be really diligent. We are often discouraged by seeing that what we have long and earnestly

prayed for shows no signs of fulfilment. We forget that, with God, what we call *time* has no existence—that God has eternity in which to fulfil our desires, and will surely do so if they are in accord with His perfect will. Or it may be that our prayer is really being answered, but not in the way which we had in mind. Or it may be that God delays his response in order to give us time to consider the matter further as to whether the object prayed for is really desirable or not. Or, as in the highly desirable coming of His Kingdom, He may be delaying it in order to show us the absolute necessity of our more active and generous coöperation before His will for mankind can be done on earth as in heaven. Or He may delay a response in order to test our confidence in Him.

The greatest example of this testing was our Lord's treatment of the Gentile woman in Syro-Phoenicia, who begged Him to heal her daughter.[8] Warned off by His disciples, even repulsed by Him, she yet persisted, lifted up by His look, His gesture perhaps,

[8] St. Matt. 15:22-28.

until the rising tide of her faith swept away every obstacle, and her prayer was granted.

But let us guard against the idea that if we are only persistent enough God can be teased into giving us what we want. Such was surely not the case with our Lord and this woman. There was no change of mind on His part; the whole course of the incident shows that His intention, from the very beginning, was to stimulate her faith in His love and power until it should become invincible then and thereafter.

The two parables which deal with the result of persistency in prayer bear out this same principle, if they are read in their proper sense.[9] In the first, the emphasis is laid on the urgency of the need which made the man persistent, not on the friend's laziness; while the second draws a striking contrast between the vagaries of an unrighteous judge and a God of perfect justice. In both cases our Lord emphasizes the duty of always praying and never losing heart.

However, there will sometimes come a

[9] St. Luke 11:5-8 and 18:1-7.

feeling—a consciousness—difficult to describe or to account for, that it would be well to desist from praying for something long desired. One should give heed to a hint of this kind as indicating that the matter is now to be left in God's hands and that He assumes the responsibility.

Finally, it cannot be too strongly urged that diligent prayer requires diligent effort to make it effective. Work without prayer is labour lost; prayer without work is empty talk. It is one of the most striking evidences of the closeness of our relationship toward God, that while it is from Him that "all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed," He refuses to grant such desires, to bring such counsels to fruit, or to make such work effective unless He has our unstinted coöperation. This is one of the considerate ways in which God imposes limits on His omnipotence.

Suppose, for example, that we consider the prayers included in the Order for Morning Prayer. The Collect for Peace has no real value unless, as a result, we deliberately

act as those having no fear. The Collect for Grace has no force at the beginning of the day if, later, we refuse to order all our doings strictly by God's governance. It is idle to pray for the President and all in authority and then neglect to vote or obey the laws of the land. Of what use is a prayer for the clergy if, the moment we are out of church, we fall to criticizing the rector? We pray, at one moment, for God's saving health unto all nations; and the next, we drop some spare change in the offering because we have never studied the Church's programme and seldom see or read a Church paper in order to discover how money may serve a world in desperate need. Or we beseech God for the afflicted and distressed, and then cheerfully drive by our city hospital or county jail without a thought. We pray for a knowledge of the truth and yet rarely, if ever, give any time to the serious reading or study of books treating of the bases of the Faith or of the Church's history and teaching. It would be as well, perhaps better, if we had spent the morning wrestling with golf or bridge in-

stead of entreating God for results which we tacitly regard as not worth working for.

God demands our coöperation in making our prayers effective; he bids us "work out our own salvation" even though it be He "that worketh in us." It is the effect of the Incarnation which united man and God indestructibly and forever, so that henceforth neither could be effective in the realm of grace without the assistance of the other. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" are words which carry a profound significance when we come to realize the perfect humanity of Christ, and the Church as His Body of which each of us is a member, bound to live as He lived, speak as He spoke, and work as He worked, in close coöperation with the Father.

The first of the laws of Prayer, then, is that, to be effective, Prayer must be based on a vital sense of the reality and presence of a personal God who is to be sought diligently, that is, habitually, with concentration of mind, definiteness of objective, and perse-

verance; and that the fulfilment of our prayers depends as much on our coöperative effort as on God's initiative.

Let us break off here for a moment and give ourselves time to think about this first law of Prayer. Just what does it imply? How far has our praying conformed to it? To what extent may our discouragements in the practice of Prayer and our sense of its unreality be due to a disregard of this very first law?

## CHAPTER IV.

A SECOND law of the science of Prayer was long ago expressed rather startingly by a man who, having been born blind, may be supposed to have had that peculiar insight regarding things of the spirit so often associated with physical blindness.

This particular man had just experienced the healing power of God through an unknown stranger, and his conviction as to the source of the power and the manner of its application was unassailable—he had the best possible proof of it. He knew that it had come from God through prayer; and, to the suggestion that, while the power may have been of God, yet the one through whose prayer the power had come was a sinner in the sight of God, he instantly retorted that such was an impossibility, for, said he, "we know that God heareth not sinners." [1]

[1] St. John 9:31.

In this statement the man laid down a great principle of Prayer, *i.e.*, that it is quite impossible to imagine that there can be anything in common between God and sin. Possibly the man had in mind the saying from his own Scriptures, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." It is the same idea in different words.

There is a sense in which sin is a deep-seated perversity of the will whereby a man's whole being has become deliberately opposed to God, and therefore separated from Him. In such a case there can be no contact between him and God; and that this is a terribly possible contingency is plainly indicated by our Lord. There are sins which "can never be forgiven"—"sins unto death" as St. Paul calls them; not, of course, some specific act of sin to which God has arbitrarily affixed the penalty of death, but rather the result of a long process of careless or deliberate searing of the conscience until it becomes atrophied, and all sense of right and wrong is lost, and repentance cannot be had because there is no wish to repent, and

the alienation from God is complete. This dreadful aspect of sin is not one upon which we ought to dwell, especially as the New Testament itself is reticent about it. It should, however, be kept in mind as a possibility, remembering always the oft-quoted progressive sequence of thoughts leading to acts, acts hardening into habits, habits forming character, and character determining destiny.

But, for us, it will be more helpful to remember merely this, that if and when our praying lacks power, it may be because of some unacknowledged or unrepented sin which, for the time being, breaks our contact with God and makes it impossible for Him to hear us. Here, again, is a self-limitation of God's omnipresence. So vile and deadly a thing is sin, and so inexpressibly holy and pure is God, that where sin abides there God cannot be. By bitter experience one learns that there is no surer way of depriving prayer of all power than the process of saying our prayers when, at the same time, we are conscious, or might become conscious if we thought about it, of some wilful and ha-

bitual sin of thought or word or deed for which we are not sincerely repentant, which we are not at great pains to get rid of, and which we persistently ignore or condone or excuse on some ground or other, imagining that God will do the same and so hear our prayer. No idea could be more deceptive. Not until we have discovered the trouble, repented of it, confessed it, atoned for it, and done our very utmost to put it out of the way, can our prayer be heard.

I know that it is not fashionable nowadays to regard sin as quite so serious a matter; but I would go even further and suggest that our prayers may sometimes be hindered by indulgence in what we would scarcely regard as actual sins, but prefer to call mere faults —tendencies, inheritances, little habits, and the like. We all have them, but they are not grounds for complacency. Suppose I have inherited a quick and ill-controlled temper, or a nervous temperament not conducive to peace at home, or a lethargic disposition making alert effort difficult. This may all be true; but simply that I was born that way

is no possible excuse for my dying that way —quite the reverse. Moreover, such so-called faults are of the very kind which our Lord most vigorously denounced. They are sins of the spirit rather than of the flesh. "Go, and sin no more," said Christ to the woman taken in the act of adultery; but on the hypocrisy and pride of the Pharisees He poured out His righteous scorn and indignation.

Moreover, I find no distinction in the New Testament between "faults" and sins; they are all rated in the same category as offences against the perfectness of God. It is noteworthy too, though unimportant, that the word "sins" does not occur in the General Confession in the Prayer Book, but the word "faults" does.

The truth is, that the age in which we live tends to minimize the actuality and the consequence of sin. It fails to see clearly the subjective aspect of sin in its effect upon the individual; it is blinder still to the objective nature of sin as inhibiting the effective working of God's power through Prayer.

And, coincidently with this generally less acute sense of sin, there is today an increasing vagueness in men's concept of God. There is a very close connection between these two facts; indeed it is a matter of common observation in much of the preaching and the religious literature of the day that those who most liberally, and in the most general terms, dwell upon God's love and universal Fatherhood, touch only lightly upon the fact of sin and man's need of some sort of redemption. The tendency is to forget that while God is Love, God is also Law; and that not even infinite love can abide the persistent and wilful disregard of law.

On the other hand, the saints of God who, through all time, have most clearly seen Him in the reality of His glory and righteousness, have also felt the most deeply the contrasting horror of their sinfulness. "Woe is me," cries Isaiah, "for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." From Peter, the sudden realization of his Lord's power brings the response, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Even upon St.

John, the beloved disciple, the effect of the vision of Christ in His glory is to cast him down as one dead.

In the case of St. Paul, as has been often pointed out, the increasing knowledge of God brought with it a deeper and deeper sense of his own sinfulness. Writing to the Corinthians, he says that he is the least of the Apostles; seven years later, he tells the Ephesians that he is less than the least of all saints; and finally, four years from then and awaiting death, he speaks of himself to Timothy as the chief of sinners.[2] This is no morbid or forced humility; it is the inevitable effect of the increasing realization of God. The more one sees of pure whiteness, the more will any shade of gray look dark; to have no sense of sin, or merely in a general and vague way, is evidence that one has never really known God. It is a matter of comparison, and for us men the sight of the character of Jesus Christ is the arresting criterion.

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[2] See I Cor. 15:9 (A. D. 56); Eph. 3:8 (A. D. 62-63); I Tim. 1:15 (A. D. 66-67).

One constantly runs across Church people who criticize the terms used in the General Confession preceding the Eucharist as being forced and exaggerated. They say that they are not conscious of manifold sins and wickedness, and that to be obliged to repeat words to the effect that the remembrance of them is grievous and the burden intolerable is merely to give an air of unreality and formalism to the whole act. Of course that is quite true. If one does not recognize sin when he sees it, to pretend to grieve for it is worse than useless.

To those who feel that way I would commend an attempt to appreciate the dramatic steps which follow in this particular approach to the vision of God—the needed official declaration of absolution; the moving words of comfort for sinners; the joining with all the company of heaven in exalted praise; the deeply solemn words and motions in the priestly act of consecration; the joint offering to God of the memorials of His Son, our Saviour; the sanctifying of the consecrated elements to our use;

the offering of ourselves to God; the universal prayer of the whole Church. Surely if this progressive approach to the very presence of God fails to give full meaning to our previous words of confession, or leaves us with a shred of self-righteousness, I really don't know what can be done about it. Something is radically wrong with us and with our whole conception of God.

It is well to remember that we have to answer not only for our own personal sins and faults—sins of omission as well as of commission—but also for the corporate sins of the Church and of society. The passive acquiescence of Christians in the sin of schism which deliberately ignores the prayer of our Lord Himself; a selfish nationalism disguised as patriotism; the indifference of the majority of Christian people in the matter of their Master's last command to His Church; the hardness of heart which can permit the appalling ravages of famine in one quarter of the world and the heaping up of every form of luxury in another; laws flouted and prisons overcrowded in Christian

communities; the sanctity of marriage ridiculed, and adultery countenanced—one might go on indefinitely with a category of corporate sins for which every Christian has a share of responsibility, and the burden of which *should* be intolerable.

But the Church, as well as society in general, becomes accustomed to familiar corporate sin; the common conscience becomes dulled, and too easily accepts whatever common practice countenances. What we need, individually, is so keen a sense of the dreadfulness of sin and of the power of God's companionship, that we will strain every nerve to retain that companionship through an ever increasing realization of the holiness and righteousness of God. Only as we practise the presence of God shall we come to any acute sense of the abhorrent and intolerable nature of sin.

Yet the Christian has no grounds for any morbid brooding over his sin, for Jesus Christ overcame it, bore it, and broke its power. To be constantly recalling our past sins of which we have truly repented, or to

be over-fearful regarding bad habits which we are earnestly trying to amend or conditions which we are labouring to improve, is to deny the power of Christ's cross and passion, His glorious resurrection and ascension, and the coming of the Holy Ghost. If we are determinedly fighting against every form and aspect of sin, personal and corporate, we shall come to the truth of the saying, "In God's presence is fullness of joy."

As to the means of overcoming sin, that again is a personal matter. But it is certainly a general fact that no sinful thought or word or act is likely to be recognized as such until it is squarely looked at. There are two ways of doing this: either by thoughtful examination of the matter and a consideration of the effect of such-and-such an action on ourselves or on others, or by talking it over with someone skilled in spiritual matters.

Having thus recognized a sin, we must now try to see it as it is—an offense primarily against God,[3] and an obstruction to our

[3] On this point, read II Samuel 11, and note David's abominable acts—adultery with Bath-sheba, the murder of Uriah, the debauching of Joab's conscience. Then read the next chapter

approach to God through prayer. I am quite sure that the most effective way of doing this is confession; at any rate, the Church places a *General Confession* in the forefront of all her Offices of common worship. This, in itself, indicates the vital importance which the Church attaches to the act of confession before proceeding to common prayer.[4] It is a necessary preliminary to the approach to God; so much so, that it seems to me highly debatable whether a person who, through his own fault, arrives at church for a celebration of the Holy Communion, after the General Confession has been said and the Absolution pronounced, may safely receive.

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and note how David was forced to see the horror of his sin against these people. Finally, turn to the fifty-first Psalm and there note David's profound realization as to the one against whom he had, primarily, sinned: "Have mercy upon me, O God. . . . Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight."

[4] It should hardly be necessary to add that what ensures the effectiveness of confession is the declaration of absolution on the part of one to whom God has given the power and commandment to declare and pronounce the absolution. It is God who absolves, but His message of release is brought to us by His official representative, and this comes with authority and assurance. A prisoner's pardon may be duly announced by the Governor of the State, but he is not assured of it or set free until the message is officially brought to him.

Be that as it may, the Church certainly teaches that the initial step toward God is a realization of sin, followed by confession and absolution.[5] An opportunity is thus provided for real thought, not only on our personal sins, but also and especially on those corporate sins of which the whole body of the Church is guilty.

In private prayer, an acute sensitiveness to sin, a determined facing of it, and real confession, are no less essential. I have already called attention to the help which I have found at the close of the day in calling to mind and *confessing audibly* the sins of which I have been guilty during the day. The very shame and embarrassment produced in me by the sound of my voice convicts me of

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[5] Here let me call attention to a mistake in emphasis of which the clergy of the Episcopal Church are often guilty. In the Absolution, two distinct objects are in view—pardon *of* sins and deliverance *from* sins. As the prayer is usually read, these two are confused and an ungrammatical sentence results. The mental pause is made after the word "you" instead of after the word "from," as if it read "Pardon and deliver you—from all your sins" which is ungrammatical. The pause should be after "from" —"Pardon and deliver you from—all your sins." This may seem a small matter to fuss about, but anything which dulls the reality of confession and the sense of pardon is worth remedying.

those particular sins as no merely mental confession could.

More valuable still in producing a sense of sin's reality and shamefulness is confession to someone else. I cannot understand the prejudice against auricular confession which seems to be imbedded in so many minds. That the confessional has been enforced and abused is surely no more of a reason for decrying the value of auricular confession than is the sight of a drowned person a sufficient reason for never taking a bath. Personally, I am convinced that most of us would have a far keener sense of sin in general and a much greater hesitancy in committing our special sins if we faced the prospect of stating them baldly to some other person. Perhaps it ought not to be so; if only God were as real to us as our friend John Doe, it would not be so; but the fact remains that to tell our sins to John Doe is actually more embarrassing to us than to tell them to God; hence most of us need a John Doe.

Moreover the practice of auricular confes-

sion is enjoined by a close follower of our Lord;[6] it is the rule among the largest body of Christians in the world; it is recommended to all Anglicans in the Book of Common Prayer (see the second Exhortation, pp. 86-88); and it is given great emphasis in connection with the so-called First Century Christian Fellowship, one of the most striking of modern attempts to establish the sense of personal relationship with God.[7] On general principles, the practice of such confession seems almost essential.

We Anglicans call a priest to be our rector. He has supposedly been trained to minister to souls in all degrees of spiritual sickness. In regard to our souls he has a position analogous to that which our family physician or the head of our local hospital has toward our bodies. If our doctor is to help us, it is

[6] See St. James 5:16.

[7] Attention might be called in this connection to the present popularity of that peculiar form of auricular confession known as *psychoanalysis*. It is certainly an extraordinary sight to see a Christian subjecting himself willingly to a course of most intimate probing of his personal character and defects on the part of a psychoanalyst—often a Jew—at ten dollars a visit, and yet raising every conceivable objection to the principle of auricular confession to a parish priest as commended by the Church.

absolutely necessary that he ascertain something of our general condition, and discover the symptoms of any special ailment from which we may be suffering. For this purpose we must voluntarily go to him and consult him. Some symptoms he may be able to see for himself, but in most cases we have to tell them to him or he has to worm them out of us by questions which may sometimes be quite embarrassing. We mind this the less, however, because of the ethics of his profession, which bind him not to reveal to others what he has learned about us.

Quite different is the case of our unfortunate priest. He knows that all of us who are under his care for our soul's sake are more or less sick with a very generalized, varied, insidious disease called sin. Most of us are suffering from acute forms of it without knowing it. In some cases our rector may discover what is the matter more or less by chance; he has to rely chiefly on observation, and if this becomes too personal we are apt to resent it. If he comes to call, the last thing we will talk to him about is the matter

of our spiritual health. We rarely go to see him; and, if we do, it is not for the purpose of telling him our symptoms of the disease, much less to allow him to probe us with embarrassing questions. No, we have no hesitation in going to our family physician and telling him of our every ache and pain; we bear his probing questions with hopeful patience; but when it is a case of our parish priest, we will tell him nothing and allow him to ask us nothing. It is as if the head doctor of a hospital should be supposed never to investigate the condition of any individual patient in the hospital, but to content himself and do his duty by lecturing once a week to those who cared to attend (usually the least ill) on the nature of disease in general, with some reference to hygiene and therapeutics.

I am well aware of two objections which may be raised at this point. On the part of some people there is a very strong conviction that sin, repentance, and forgiveness are a personal matter between the individual soul and God, in which no third person has any right or need to intervene. Many of

these are saintly people, far advanced in the Christian life, whose characters show that they have attained the peace and power which come only from a clear conscience toward God. But most of us are having a hard fight, needing every atom of help we can get; and it seems a pity that anything should be allowed to deprive us of an aid which the experience of the Church has always commended.

Secondly—and this is a really valid difficulty—very few of the clergy are fitted by training or temperament to minister to their people as skilled confessors; many of them would be surprised and embarrassed if it were even suggested, and their people are quite aware of this. The clergy have an excuse in the fact that they are rarely confronted by any real exigency on the part of individuals. They have become habituated to a certain routine of generalized confession and absolution, and they seldom are faced by one "who cannot quiet his own conscience but requireth further comfort or counsel." I imagine that if we lay people were more

sensitive to sin we would more often find ourselves in just such a case. Then, if we were to act on the Prayer Book suggestion and go frankly to our parish priest, there is no doubt of the benefit which would accrue, not only to ourselves but to him.

Now I am not talking "High Church" or "Low Church" or Romanism or Protestantism or any such thing. I am merely suggesting a practical way by which, in case other methods have failed, you may become more disturbingly alive to your particular sins and may more effectively get rid of them, thus gaining communion with God and discovering the power of Prayer. For, "God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and do His will, him He heareth." It is the fervent prayer of the *righteous* man, only, which is of much avail.[8]

Now again, even at the risk of missing the continuity of our thought about these laws of Prayer, let us stop to think and to question ourselves quite seriously about all

[8] St. James 5: 16.

that we have been considering in this chapter. It has been a long one; but only because it has dealt with the one thing which, more than anything else, makes Prayer futile. Let us quietly search out our spirits; and then determine that, from this moment, the particular sin which we are excusing and cherishing shall no longer rule in us to the exclusion of God's power.

## CHAPTER V.

A THIRD law of Prayer, and the last which we shall consider here, is stated by that follower of our Lord who was closest to His mind and heart:

*"This is the confidence which we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us: and if we know that He heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we desired of Him."* [1]

St. John is often spoken of as the apostle of love. He is also the apostle of certainty. It is refreshing in these days of perplexity and vagueness of belief, when many of the leaders of religious thought seem hardly to know where they stand, to read this letter of St. John and to note what conviction it expresses. If you will underline the word

[1] I John 5: 14, 15.

"know" wherever it occurs in the Epistle, you will catch something of the assurance which characterizes this eager seeker after God. He speaks of the Christian's *confidence* in prayer, as applying to any and every petition whatsoever. God's hearing and our receiving are coincident. It is a very broad statement, but St. John's own experience has proved it true. Moreover, it is precisely what Christ Himself had promised: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do." [2]

But note that the response to our prayers is conditional. To be effective, they must be petitions *in Christ's name*. This must mean something more than merely adding to a petition the common phrase, "In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord."

We shall see how much more it means if we recall the fact that, in the Hebrew mind, name and character were closely associated. Thus when Moses asked how he was to answer the Israelites in Egypt when they should question him as to the name of the God who had commissioned him to be their

[2] St. John 14: 13. See also the variant in St. John 15: 16.

deliverer, Jehovah said to him, "Say unto the children of Israel, *'Ehyeh* (I am—I will be) hath sent me unto you.' " [3] The name expressed the eternally unchanging character of God. So again later, when Jehovah passed before Moses on Mount Sinai, He "proclaimed His Name" and there follows a statement of God's character.[4] It was the same with men's names. Children were given names prophetic or significant of a certain character. Thus the Blessed Virgin's Son was named "Jesus"—Saviour. Sometimes when events changed a person's character, he was given a new name: Jacob, "Supplanter," becomes Israel, "Prevailer";[5] and the impetuous Simon becomes Peter the Rock.[6] Students of the book of the Revelation will recall that to those who have overcome in this life will be given a "new name"—God's name written visibly "on their foreheads"—significant of the *character* which, by God's grace, they have developed. Even now, each one of us is writing the letters of his new name, in his

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[3] Ex. 3:14. [4] Ex. 34:6-7. [5] Gen. 32:28.
[6] St. John 1:42. See also St. Matt. 16:18.

increasing likeness to the character of Christ.

When, therefore, our Lord promises to grant the petitions of those who ask "in His name," He evidently refers to prayers made in His perfect character—the character of One who consistently lived according to God's will in every thought and word and deed, so that His every desire was in line with the will and purpose of God and nothing in Him was opposed to that perfect will. There are two sayings of His which, taken together, explain our Lord's always effective praying: "I do always such things as please Him," and "I know that thou hearest me always." [7]

We cannot approach that perfect harmony of the divine and human will, our prayers here will never be perfectly in keeping with the character of Christ but will always be tainted by the imperfections of our lives and tinged with the debased colours of our desires. It may be with us, as it was with the disciples to whom our Lord said that until they had known Him—religious men though

[7] St. John 8:29; 16:42.

they were—they had never prayed in His name.[8] But it is certain that the more we learn, as they did, to conform our characters to that of Jesus Christ, the more will our desires be brought in line with the will of God and our praying, therefore, become increasingly effective.

So when St. John states his rule of Prayer, in which he has the utmost confidence, he gives it as his experience that, to be heard effectively, the object of the petition must be something which is in accord with God's will. The question, then, is how this is to be determined.

But first it may occur to us to ask why, if God wills that we are to have some desire or need fulfilled, it is necessary to pray about it at all. Why not simply trust Him and let things take their course?

Well, we don't treat our children that way. There are many necessities which we provide for them as a matter of course, just because they are our children; but there are countless desires in a child's mind,

[8] St. John 16:24.

the reality and intensity of which the parent judges by the child's readiness to ask. So, I am sure, is it with God. He may be willing and eager to give me some good gift, but He is determined to wait until I am ready to ask. We miss much through not asking.

An excellent illustration of this principle is given by the Rev. E. E. Holmes in his book *Prayer and Practice*.

"Imagine this prayer-force at work, in the case of an earthly father and child. The father predetermines that he will give his son a fixed, though unstated, allowance; but he makes the bestowal of the gift subject to the son's request. His purpose is there, fixed and determinate; but, until the conditions are fulfilled, and the petition is made, the father deliberately precludes himself from action. His purpose is unchanged, but it is quiescent. Some force is required to move it into action, and this force is the son's prayer. Thus prayer, which satisfies the ordained conditions (conditions as fixed as the purpose), is the force which moves the father's will.

"The son may exercise his free will and reject the conditions: he may refuse to ask; or he may ask amiss; or may ask for too much, or too little; or

may fail to comply with the spirit of the conditions —and, as long as he does so, the father's purpose is quiescent, though unchanged. Or, on the other hand, he may 'make his request known unto' the father, and, by so doing, move the father's will from quiescence into action. It is, in either case, the will of the son which moves, or fails to move, the will of the father.

"It may be so with God. Man's prayer moves God's purpose into activity. It does not change, but it does release, His purpose; and, in this sense, it is true that 'the will of man moves the Will of God.'"

Again, many of our most laudable desires require our coöperation with God for their fulfilment. We may pray "Thy Kingdom come," till doomsday; but, so far as our part in it is concerned, it will never come unless we do our utmost to bring it. "Work out your own salvation . . . for it is God that worketh in you," is the Christian form of the old adage, "God helps those who help themselves."

But to return to our original inquiry—how, amid the multiplicity of our desires, are we to discover which are in accordance with God's will and which are not?

We can readily see that though there may be no clear cut answer to this question, nevertheless matters concerning which we might pray group themselves naturally in one of three categories: (1) those contrary to God's will, (2) those in accord with His will, and (3) those which are indeterminable.

Regarding the first of these, little need be said. We are, for example, obviously debarred from praying for anything which would injure someone else. So also a prayer which voices anger, or hatred, or uncharitableness, or purely selfish desires, or any evil thought regarding another person—such a prayer cannot be heard by God.

We are equally in the realm of certainty when we come to the second category—results which we are sure that God wills for ourselves or others—provided we observe those general laws of Prayer which we have been considering.

For example, our own individual growth in the spiritual life is surely a matter regarding which our Father is profoundly concerned, and which He is ready to do all

in His power to bring about. Indeed, at the very basis of our Lord's teaching is the supreme value of the individual soul. He reserved His most searching words, not for people in the mass, but for individuals—Nicodemus, and the woman of Sychar, for example. So evident is this, that it has often been said that had there been only one single rebellious human being on earth, the sacrifice of the Son of God would still have been a necessity. Why is it, then, that my advance is so desperately slow; why does the perfection which God wills for me seem so unattainable?

Well, we must bear in mind, as was said above, that even God's own will can accomplish little apart from the exercise of my own will. He never *forces* His gifts on anyone. Saul's conversion wasn't the sudden and enforced change which it appears to be. Rather was it a process, begun at the time of Stephen's murder, and only culminating on the Damascus road when the veering conscience pointed true at last and the warped will was made straight.

It is well to remember, in our striving after righteousness, not only that we are to coöperate with God, but that God is working with us to attain His will for us. "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. He himself pleads for us in yearnings that can find no words, and the Searcher of hearts knows what the Spirit's meaning is, because his intercessions for the saints are in harmony with God's will." [9] There is, therefore, every reason for confidence in the final issue; it is inevitable.

The case is more difficult when it concerns another's salvation, for whom we have long prayed with no apparent result. Surely our friend's awakening *must* be in accordance with the will of Him who would that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Why, then, the apparent failure?

I say *apparent,* because we never know what may be going on beneath the stubborn outer crust of a man's nature as the result of our prayers. Nor must we forget that the

[9] Rom. 8:26, 27. Weymouth.

processes of God are slow and eternity is long. Some day surely, either here or hereafter, that spirit will stand with us in the light.

Yet there may be actual failure here so far as we are concerned. The difficulty may lie—generally does—in our friend's own indifference or opposition. It is amazing that a man's will can thwart God's; but it is true. Under such circumstances, we can only rest upon God "who alone can order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men." But let us be sure that the failure of our prayers and efforts on behalf of our friend is not caused by some defect in ourselves, some sin cherished which annuls our prayers. Or it may be that our efforts toward him have been crude and tactless, serving only to stiffen his opposing will. Or we may, even with the best intention, be exhibiting to him a certain type of piety which seems natural to ourselves, but is anything but attractive to him. In any case, under difficult conditions like this, one ought naturally to think of the special efficacy promised by our Lord to the

prayers of two in agreement; remembering, as before, the yearning of the Holy Spirit to this same end.

Again, we may be sure that God desires intensely the final establishment of His Kingdom on earth, and the perfect unity of His Church as the only means available for that supreme purpose. Of course the Church has made progress in the evangelization of the world, human relations have improved during the last nineteen centuries, peace on earth is nearer than it ever was before, the gleam of Christian unity is on the horizon. But why is it all so slow? Why, after nineteen-hundred years of the Church's presence in the world, does she number no more than six-hundred millions of adherents out of a world population of sixteen-hundred millions? This is not as God would have it.

Here, the fault must rest squarely on the shoulders of each one of us; for, again, one must repeat that God demands coöperative effort, and it is this which the Church as a whole refuses to give in any sufficient measure. Look at the tragic manner in which, dur-

ing recent years, the National Council of the Episcopal Church—one of the richest per capita Churches in the world—has been forced to let great opportunities pass, to curtail work, to abandon stations, and finally to diminish still further the already inadequate salaries of her workers at home and abroad: and all because her people—especially the rich—simply *will not* offer money in any degree proportionate to their ability. The truth is that most of us are so wrapped up in our own ease, so content with our own surroundings, that we have fallen into an attitude of utter indifference toward the needs of the world. Like sponges we have absorbed the Water of Life, unconcious of nations athirst. Our Master's great missionary commands fall on ears deadened by the conventions and routine of our religion.[10]

Again, there is a lack of clear-sighted moral stamina such as is needed to check the progress of social injustice and open disre-

[10] These four commands are to be found in St. John 4:35; St. Matt. 9:38; St. Matt. 10:8; St. Mark 16:15. Note that in the order given here they are progressive, and that they are all equally imperative—Look, Pray, Give, Go.

gard of Christ's law. Like Gallio, we care for none of these things.

It is not opposition on the part of her enemies which holds the Church back from the fulfilment of her redeeming mission, but sheer indifference on the part of each one of us, her members—lukewarmness which blows neither hot nor cold—the sin which even Satan himself regards as beneath his dignity, but which he uses, through us, to thwart God's manifest will. From this indifference there results no passion for world-wide evangelization and peace, or for social righteousness, or for Christian unity; and the Church has to fight her battle against the world amid divided counsels and opposing policies. Indifference robs the Church of material forces and supplies. It is indifference which begets ignorance concerning the Faith, and concerning the Church, "the pillar and ground of the Faith." There is not an evil in the world today which is not traceable, directly or indirectly, to the indifference and lukewarmness of Christian people like you and me.

What can be done about it? How can we assure the accomplishment of God's plain will for the world? Apart from a renewed dedication of each one of us to more determined activity, I know of no other way than that of united prayer. "If two of you agree . . . it shall be done." If you can begin, literally, with only one other in this concerted prayer, much will be accomplished. Then the two may grow to ten, the ten to a hundred. Who can measure the possible results? And how if the whole of Christendom were so praying with one mind and one heart! It could be done if two began it.

Especially valuable is such united prayer, for so great ends, in connection with the Holy Communion; for it is then, if ever, that we are most surely in that right relationship toward God which makes Prayer effective. In that moment, too, we represent to God, and plead with Him to make available, the infinite merits of Christ's sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It is then, too, that we can best realize the communion of saints and the united prayer which must be rising to

God from the hearts of all the faithful in heaven and on earth that His Kingdom may truly come on earth as it is already an accomplished fact in heaven.

So much for effective prayer regarding some of the gifts which it is God's will to give us.

We come now to those many objectives of prayer concerning which it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether or not they are in accordance with God's will. Let us see if we can find any guidance in this matter.

In a general way, it is to be noted that we have been given a guide in this matter which, if we can rightly interpret it, is almost infallible.

The Lord's Prayer has rightly been called *the* prayer "in the name of Jesus Christ," for it comes from one whose surrendered earthly life was the guarantee of His effective praying. When He specified the things we may pray for with assurance, we may be quite certain that those things are in perfect accord with the will of God. The de-

sires expressed in that prayer are expressed in His name or character—they are characteristic of Him; so that when we are using it we are truly praying in His character and with His power. Let me use an illustration.

Suppose that a very rich friend of mine goes abroad, leaving a large balance in his bank. Before going, he gives me his full power of attorney to use as I see fit. Presently I draw a cheque on my friend's bank account, sign it with his name, and present it to the teller to be cashed. The teller looks at the signature and asks by what authority I have signed it with Mr. Blank's name, whereupon I show him Mr. Blank's power of attorney. The teller is then obliged to cash that cheque, for it is presented for payment in my friend's name and with his authorization; it is as if presented by my friend himself. Of course it is obvious that I must be thoroughly acquainted with my friend's wishes and use his wealth as he would desire; but, with this proviso, his bank account is at my full disposal.

So with the Lord's Prayer. It is a series of drafts upon God's inexhaustible deposits of grace and power. The Son of God has given us authority to draw upon those deposits. Each draft represents a special objective which we may be sure is what God desires. The first three have to do with the coming supremacy of God in human society. The next concerns our physical needs. The two final ones, our spiritual needs. All of these petitions being in accord with God's will, they cannot fail eventually of being granted, provided only that in making them we observe the general laws of effective prayer. So the Lord's Prayer affords an accurate test by means of which we can determine, regarding any particular wish or desire, whether it be according to God's will or not. *If, after careful thought, we conclude that it comes naturally and without forcing under one of the clauses of the Lord's Prayer, we may proceed with absolute confidence in the result; but if there be any doubt in the matter, we must hesitate.*

Thus we pray with firm assurance for all

that pertains to the Kingdom of God on earth, and for the spiritual well-being of all Christian people; these are ensured if our thorough coöperation with God be also enlisted.

But we are not quite so sure when it comes to the *temporal* well-being of ourselves and all other Christians. Have we, for example, any assurance of a favourable answer to prayers for rain; or for personal prosperity; or for safety in time of danger; or for deliverance from sickness? These are all temporal needs, and therefore of less moment in the sight of God; yet the Lord's Prayer undoubtedly includes such needs.

But note that the petition "Give us this day our daily bread" is indicative of bare necessities only. We need to distinguish quite clearly between real necessities and luxuries. Especially in these days when the whole scale of living has advanced to such an unprecedented height and when things which, a few years ago, were regarded as luxuries are now taken as necessities, we are all apt to lose sight of our stewardship and to misappro-

priate the money entrusted to us. A motor used for pleasure only—perhaps two or three; an unnecessarily large house; too great insistence on being coddled, and the demand for the services of too many people to minister to our ease; a certain restlessness which requires many establishments and keeps us on the move season by season at needless expense—all these are mere luxuries, beyond the limits of any assurance in Christian prayer. It is true, they are the luxuries of the very rich, but I am by no means sure that the average American isn't "tarred with the same brush" in his attempts to ape the rich, and in his misinterpretation of the term "necessities." Even the unspoken coveting of needless luxuries is a form of wordless prayer from which a Christian is debarred.

As to prayers for rain or clear weather and the like, here we are confronted with purely natural causes. The weather is determined by physical conditions and ruled by the laws of atmospheric pressure. Over these we have no control, and we are entirely without means to *help ourselves*. But if we have

any belief at all in an immanent God, I can see no reason whatever why we should deny Him the power to increase the atmospheric pressure here and decrease it there or to direct the course of the winds, without in the least inhibiting so-called natural law. Provided excessive rain or protracted drought is seriously endangering our very subsistence, and since we are powerless to help ourselves in the matter, it seems to me that resort to God in prayer is not only permissible but obligatory.

Again, for deliverance in times of unavoidable danger or when there has been no thoughtless exposure to unnecessary risk, I am sure that we may pray with confidence whether for ourselves or others. The ninety-first Psalm and our Lord's reference to God's constant watchfulness over us [11] are our sufficient assurance.

But on the whole, I suppose that the efficacy of prayer in the case of sickness is the question which has always aroused the keenest interest. We can do no more here than

[11] St. Matt. 10:29-31.

consider a very few aspects of the matter in a very general way.

The New Testament gives us our first evidence. Our Lord healed disease by the sole power of God, applied through prayer and in faith. A similar healing power resided in the Apostolic Church, and was exercised by the leaders of the Church. St. James specifies the procedure for healing: prayer over the sick person by presbyters, followed by anointing with oil in faith.[12] This seems to have been a normal custom in the early Church. There is, therefore, abundant warrant from the early days of Christianity for healing by faith with or without physical means as well.

But we are obliged to note that, at that time, there was no such thing as medical science. Diagnosis had to rely on merely external symptoms, and therapeutics was limited to the use of a few vegetable drugs. Today, the increasing knowledge of the human body and mind has left few centers of disease impregnable to the skilled surgeon and physician. Man can now *help himself* in

[12] St. James 5:14-15.

the prevention and cure of his diseases, and it is pertinent to ask how far, if at all, this fact modifies his right to depend wholly upon divine aid.

If all knowledge resides in God and is derived from Him, then He is to be praised for His gift of knowledge to men, and the gift is to be used as of Him. But does this mean that in thus giving men the ability to help themselves, He thereby denies Himself as the source of all healing power, whether manifest in the skill of the physician or in the faith of the patient? Does the whole principle of coöperation break down here; and that, by leaving out the one supreme factor? No. Surely God must mean us to call upon Him in our times of trouble; but also to utilize every atom of the knowledge and skill which He has put at our disposal. Neither can be fully effective without the other. It was as if to teach us this that our Lord frequently used some physical agent in His works of healing —a touch, a bit of clay, washing in a pool.

"My son, in thy sickness be not negligent; but pray unto the Lord, and He will make thee whole.

Leave off from sin, and cleanse thy heart from all wickedness. Then give place to the physician, for the Lord hath created him. There is a time when in their very hands is the issue for good. For they shall also pray unto the Lord, that He would prosper that which they give for relief and to maintain life.[13]

But if prayer to God and faith in His power are so essential in this coöperative process of healing, what must we think of the only too evident fact that the usual medical practice of today almost wholly eliminates any idea of God's coöperation? In your own experience and neighbourhood, to what extent is the determining power of God recognized by the doctors whom you know, or the nurses, or in your local hospital—even if it be a "Church hospital"? I would hazard the guess that if such a condition be discovered it will be among Roman Catholics. I wonder how far Christians are warranted in making use of, or tolerating, medical science divorced from all recognition of the one primary source of health and healing.

[13] See *Ecclesiasticus* 38, 1-14.

There is another point worthy of consideration. Are we quite sure that bodily health is always a plus factor in the economy of God? The redemption of mankind was not secured except through the pain of the Cross. It was St. Paul's joy that he was permitted to suffer, thereby completing whatever was lacking in Christ's afflictions on behalf of the Church.[14] He had also prayed repeatedly for deliverance from a physical infirmity; yet he came to glory in the fact of its continuance, for his very disabilities gave free scope for the power of Christ to be made manifest in him.[15] Probably most of us have known Christians who, through pain and sickness nobly borne, have testified, as they could in no other way, to the patience and joy of the indwelling Christ. It would sometimes seem as if humanity at large were called upon to bear a definite quota of suffering, and that God laid the greater proportion of the universal burden upon those strong souls able to bear it, knowing that the majority of us were too weak to take even our share.

[14] Col. 1:24. [15] II Cor. 12:7-9.

There have been instances, too, of prayers for recovery of health being granted, yet with disastrous consequences. It would apparently have been better if King Hezekiah had died of his illness after the deliverance of his people from the Assyrian horde, rather than have been restored to health through the prayers of Isaiah, only to arouse the cupidity of the Babylonian envoys and thus pave the way for his nation's overthrow.[16]

Again, we are altogether too prone to regard sickness as a calamity because it may end in death. But to the Christian, death itself should have no terrors, even if the manner of its coming be lingeringly painful or suddenly tragic. And as for what is beyond, surely the prospect is most desirable. For it is difficult to imagine God as surprised by any Christian's death, or unprepared for his coming. Rather are we taught that the place and work of each of us is already prepared; so that we shall proceed in the life of service begun here, only with every fleshly limitation

[16] II Kings 20.

removed and every good capacity heightened. This is surely worth thinking of when serious illness or possibly death has to be faced.

"There will come a time when it shall be light; and when man shall awaken from his lofty dreams, and find his dreams still there, and that nothing has gone save his sleep."

Thus it seems to me that, while prayer in cases of sickness is thoroughly warranted, it should always be conditional prayer subject gladly to the good will of God. For this reason I think that, in the Book of Common Prayer, the customary *Prayer for the Sick,* in its emended form omitting the alternative clause at the end, has lost a very important feature. Far better, to my mind, is the petition in the great *Prayer for All Sorts and Conditions of Men* where, in the case of those afflicted or distressed in mind, body, or estate, we pray that it will please God "to relieve their necessities and to give them a happy issue out of all their afflictions." That would seem a well-nigh perfect form of general prayer under the circumstances. But its use in common worship

surely does not preclude, in individual cases, an act of faith accompanied by the scriptural anointing or other physical means of healing, provided the latter are kept in their properly subordinate place.

Again, our Lord's prophecy of "greater works" for His Church opens up a vast field of unused power with regard to healing. At least, in the minds of those who saw them, His acts of curing disease were certainly among His "great works", and it is fair to assume that this power was included in His promise to His followers. So far as the records go, there is, in His case, no instance of failure. He healed all who came to Him in faith. Why, then, cannot we? There may be several possible reasons.

First, His object in healing was, in many cases, quite different from ours. I had occasion, some time ago, to analyze all of the instances of individual healing recorded in the Gospels, and I discovered that, in seventeen out of twenty-six, a definite spiritual result accompanied or followed the physical recovery. In other words, in the case of sixty-five per

cent of sick people cured by our Lord, He used the body merely as a means of reaching the soul. In some instances, this was deliberately intended; the healing of the soul was the main objective, the diseased body was merely a means of approach. Compare with this the record of any Christian hospital. Do sixty-five per cent of the patients leave the hospital restored in soul as well as body? In most cases, has there been any determined effort to reach individual souls at all? In private practice, do even Christian doctors or nurses keep in mind this supreme objective?

Secondly, it may be that our comparative failure in this regard, as in many others, is the direct measure of how far we fall short of what God would have us be in character and resulting power. Of what we might be, Jesus Christ is the brilliant example. It was not in His power as God that He did His mighty works; for in the act of investing Himself with humanity the Son of God "emptied Himself" of His divine attributes and assumed our very nature, tempted as we

are tempted, overcoming as we might overcome, endued with power just as we might be. In His perfect humanity He refused to take advantage of His essential deity, and no act of His on earth is beyond your power and mine as "very members incorporate in His body."

But we must recall again and always that the constant effectiveness of His prayers—the fact that God always "heard" Him—was due to the still more basic fact that His every thought and word and deed was pleasing to God and in conformity with God's will. Hence it came about that He had so far disciplined His will and His desires that all desires contrary to God's will were eliminated, and no wish was left except a passion for godliness. With us, on the contrary, all sorts of wilfulness, mixed motives, and selfish desires remain mingled with our higher aspirations; and so we find our praying ineffective and discouraging. As the most practical of the New Testament writers puts it: "You have not, because you do not pray; you ask and yet do not receive, because you pray

wrongly, your object being to waste on your pleasures what you acquire." [17]

We will come to *pray* more in accordance with God's will—and therefore more effectively, only as we come to *live* according to His will; because living consistently and habitually in that harmony does eradicate contrary desires, so that more and more the things that we desire are those which God also desires. This is true, not only in the specific matter which we have just been considering, but in all of those more or less doubtful things regarding which we cannot tell whether they are according to God's will or not.

Of course the question arises, as before in a different connection, why pray at all about these matters concerning which we are so in doubt. If we can't trust our own judgment or desires, why not simply leave everything to God and let it go at that?

Well, there are two parties concerned—myself and God. I *need* to pray about everything that concerns and interests me; if I

[17] St. James 4:3. Weymouth.

don't, I worry about them. Perhaps it ought not to be so; but I know, as a matter of fact, that it is often a great pleasure and relief to talk things over with a friend. All of us do this constantly; why not do it with God? From God's point of view—that of a Father—surely our own experience of parenthood would lead us to expect that God rejoices in the childlikeness which leads us to Him with requests about anything and everything, however trivial. You would certainly be distressed if you were suddenly to find out that one of your children had been habitually reticent about what concerned him, for fear that you might laugh at its pettiness. No. The fact that a child comes to its father freely about everything that interests him is one of the chief rewards of fatherhood.

Nor can we tell in the least what, in the directing of our lives, is trivial and what important.

Five miles or so from the Grand Central Station in New York, there is a switch, its point as thin as a chisel-edge. That sharp point seems small and insignificant enough,

yet it determines whether the train eventually lands up in one or the other of two cities a thousand miles apart. If we are not in the habit of consulting with God about what seem the most insignificant matters, we may eventually discover that it was just those small things which determined the course of our lives. God has a microscopic eye for minute detail. It is St. Paul's dictum that in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, we are to let our requests be made known unto God.

Not, however—fortunately for us—that all our requests will thereupon be granted. I recall having one of my small grandsons come to me one day begging for my shiny razor-blade. I denied him; whereupon he set up a howl of indignation. But I was right. So is God right when He denies some of our prayers—infinitely right; because, while Love would incline to grant all, and Power knows no limit in granting, Wisdom knows what to withhold and what to grant. There is reason for prayer and supplication about everything, *with thanksgiving,* when you are

dealing with God. And the result of it will be as St. Paul concludes, that "the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." [18]

Let us also again recall the most reassuring statement of St. Paul that, while we may not always know whether or not the objectives of our praying are according to God's will, the Holy Spirit does know; and that He is constantly interpreting our prayers and reenforcing their power by His own inexpressible sympathy with us and in the light of God's perfect will.

It may now be worth while to recapitulate the course of our discussion.

First we saw that Prayer is a means of putting ourselves in touch with the all-pervading power of God. We then considered the fact that since God is the source of power, whether physical or spiritual, there should be a very close analogy between Prayer and the manner in which men discover and apply the forces of

[18] Phil. 4: 6-7.

Nature. If the latter are subject to law in general, and each is governed by its special laws and works only in accordance with those laws, then it seemed fair to assume that the power represented by Prayer is, like Science, a manifestation of God, and has its special laws through the observance of which it is made effective.

Incidentally, we noted a certain parallelism between Prayer and the many forms of Art; the one, like the other, engaging the highest effort of the mind, the heart, and the will; and both requiring some fitting expression.

We then examined the records of experts in the matter of Prayer to see if they had stated any of the principles or laws governing its effective use. We discovered three such statements.

The first indicated that the value of prayer depends on our keen perception of God as a real and personal Presence; and on the degree in which we pray habitually, with concentration of mind, having a definite objective, and exercising patient faith.

The second was to the effect that God hears prayer only as he who would pray learns to recognize his sins, confesses them, repents of them, makes reparation for them, and uses his utmost endeavour continually to rid himself of them.

The third had to do with the confidence with which we may bring our desires to God and expect a favorable answer, provided those desires are in line with God's will.

We deduced from these statements the further general principles that it is useless to pray unless we are at the same time bending every effort to bring our prayers to fulfilment; that the nature of our desires is modified by the degree to which we are living according to God's will; and that God desires us to come to Him regarding every matter which interests or concerns us, irrespective of its seeming importance.

Not one of my readers can realize more keenly than do I the exceeding difficulty of the task which this discussion has set before us. I dare not minimize these difficulties, nor

do I think that I have exaggerated them, unless the records of Christ's earthly life are, throughout, exaggerated accounts. We would do well to pause and consider whether the results to be expected are in any way worth the trouble involved.

The practice of prayer requires much concentrated effort of the mind and a disciplining of the will if one is to be anything more than a mere tyro; but so does the practice of music or sculpture or architecture. If one of our children shows an artistic bent, we do everything in our power to encourage and develop it; we provide him with the best masters; we urge him to study and practise. It is not too much to say that every child has a natural and inborn gift for religion which can be developed to the point of expertness if he be given half a chance; an "artistic career" of eternal significance is open to him. Why, then, should the mighty gift that is in him be allowed to become atrophied through sheer neglect? Is the Art of Prayer less important to acquire than the ability to play the violin?

Again, expertness in Prayer demands utter loyalty to a militant Leader and a fighting Body; and corporate power comes only from individual obedience and self-discipline. Why, then, should we tacitly or openly permit our children or ourselves to live on the assumption that constant rebellion against the commands of God will be overlooked, or that the road to victory is one along which we can wander at ease, each taking whatever path he likes, irrespective of where the army marches against the common foe? Whatever we may think of the outcry "I did not raise my boy to be a soldier", to apply it to the Christian life of the baptized and confirmed is to stultify our children and ourselves in the sight of God, and to play into the hands of the enemy as traitors.

Of course all this is difficult; but it is no more so than the arduous days and the sleepless nights which the scientist spends in his laboratory or the musician in his studio.

And what of the rewards? All I can say is that, from my own small experience, I

judge them to be beyond all that we could ask or think.

If enlightenment as to the nature and being of God be supremely desirable amid the disturbing voices coming to us from the intellectual fog which surrounds us, then we shall find in prayer the means of rising above the mists of speculation.

If the growing acquaintanceship with God be of any value, practice in prayer is the road to it.

If victory over our own lower natures and desires is longed for, it will be attained through prayer.

If a lasting freedom from constant worry and anxious care would certainly increase our efficiency in our daily occupation, then prayer will prove our means of deliverance.

If we long to see every energy of God liberated throughout the world, that result can be attained through prayer.

Finally, if we really desire to rid ourselves of our deadly apathy and indifference, and thus actually become fellow-workers with God, even this can gradually be brought

about through prayer, and we shall discover within ourselves latent powers hitherto unsuspected, and quiet means of influencing others where we have failed before.

For prayer is Christlikeness and, therefore, "the power of an endless life."

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